



Fame (and debts) beyond the sea
two mentions of imm Amad b. Ibrhm in an Indian Arabic source

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ALESSANDRO BAUSI – ALESSANDRO GORI – GIANFRANCESCO LUSINI

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Editorial Note

We conceived the present volume in the course of 2012 as a *Festschrift* offered to Paolo Marrassini by colleagues, friends, and pupils. After the dedicatee passed away on 10 January 2013, trusting in the confidence of the numerous ones who had already accepted to contribute, we decided to keep on working on the volume in the only possible form of the *Gedenkschrift*.¹

A substantial number of authors from various academic environments and different countries accepted our proposal to contribute to the memorial volume: to all of them we are very grateful for their engagement, patience, and understanding. We are convinced that the variety of spectrum and approach of the contributions faithfully reflects the vastity of scholarly interests and human relationships cultivated and entertained by Paolo Marrassini.

We are particularly grateful to Riccardo Contini for having accepted to write his “Ricordo”.

The publication of the volume has been supported by the financial contribution of the *gratulantes* listed in the *Tabula gratulatoria*, and by the fi-

¹ We have shared the editorial tasks and the overall responsibility of the preparation of the volume. For technical and organizational reasons, the contributions by Alessio Agostini, Amsalu Tefera, Robert Beylot, Marco Bonechi, Antonella Brita, Maria Bulakh, Franco Cardini, Amalia Catagnoli, Alessandro Catastini, Riccardo Contini, Gianfranco Fiacadori, Massimiliano Franci, Getatchew Haile, Felice Israel, Michael A. Knibb, Paolo La Spisa, Alberto Nocentini, Denis Nosnitsin & Maria Bulakh, Pierluigi Piovaneli, Gloria Rosati, Andrzej Zaborksi have been edited by Alessandro Bausi. The contributions by Lidia Bettini, Pietro Clemente, Giovanni Dore, Pelio Fronzaroli, Vincenzo Saladino, Marie-Claude Simeone-Senelle and Tesfay Tewolde have been edited by Alessandro Gori. The contributions by Sergio Baldi, Franca Pecchioli, Maria Vittoria Tonietti and Alessandro Triulzi have been edited by Gianfrancesco Lusini.

ALESSANDRO GORI

**Fame (and debts) beyond the sea: two mentions of imām Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm
in an Indian Arabic source**

The episode of the *ḡihād* of *imām* Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm is deeply engraved in the historical memory of the Ethiopians, both Muslims and Christians. The events of the military campaign led by the Islamic leader play a decisive role in shaping the reciprocal perceptions of the two communities.

I remember that I first learnt of *imām* Aḥmad during a class of Paolo Marrassini on the history of Ethiopia at the University of Florence. It was one of my first steps in the study of the Islamic culture in Ethiopia. It is thus with a deeply felt gratitude that I dedicate this brief note on two so far unnoticed texts dealing with *imām* Aḥmad to the loving memory of that great scholar who was my teacher and mentor.

°ABD AL-QĀDIR B. ŠAYḤ B. °ABDALLĀH AL-°AYDARŪS AND HIS *AL-NŪR AL-SĀFIR* °AN *AḤBĀR AL-QARN AL-°ĀŠIR*

°Abd al-Qādir al-°Aydarus was born in the Āl °Aydarus, a well-known branch of the Saqqāf clan of the Ba °Alawī group of South Yemeni *sayyid*-s (descendants of Ḥusayn b. °Alī b. Abī Ṭālib). The eponymous ancestor of the family is traditionally considered to be °Abdallāh b. Abī Bakr al-Sakrān b. °Abd al-Raḥmān al-Saqqāf of Tarīm (d. 1461) who was nicknamed al-°Aydarās by his father.¹

¹ The proposed explanation of the unclear *laqab* al-°Aydarūs in al-Šillī (ed. 1319 A.H., II: 152; from °Atayrūs interpreted as a name of the lion) must be taken as a kind of folk-etymology. General information on the group can be found in Löfgren *Encyclopaedia of Islam*² s.v. “°Aydarūs”.

The ʿAydārūs spread in the Arabian Peninsula, in India and Indonesia following the well-known routes of the “Ḥaḍramī Diaspora”.² They are revered everywhere as a house of piety, learning and nobility and provided (and provide) the Muslim communities where they settled with devotedly venerated holy men and highly respected ʿulamāʾ.

The main steps of the life of ʿAbd al-Qādir³ can be easily traced back, as the Indian Muslim learned man inserted a short autobiographical note in his main work.⁴ Moreover, an amount of information on him is collectable in Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr al-Šillī’s *Mašraʿ al-rawī*, one of the most important historical sources on the Yemenite *sāda*.⁵

ʿAbd al-Qādir was born on 20th *rabīʿ al-awwal* 978 A.H. (20 August 1570) in Aḥmadābād in Gujarat where his father had eventually ended after staying in Zabīd, Mecca and Šiḥr. His mother was an Indian slave. She was donated to his father by a charitable woman member of the royal family of Gujarat. Despite her servile status, she was pious, humble and full of many other good qualities.⁶

ʿAbd al-Qādir went through the full *curriculum studiorum* of the learned man studying the Qurʾān, theology, *fiqh* and mysticism under the guidance of many different scholars. He eventually became a teacher and a sufi master of the Qādiriyya brotherhood and started writing books and having lots of stu-

² Research of the spread of the *Ḥaḍramī*-s in the Indian Ocean area is a well-established field in Islamic studies: see, among others, Freitag–Clarence-Smith 1997, Ho 2006 and, specifically on the presence of the *Ḥaḍramī* in Eritrea, Miran 2012.

³ The author is mentioned in *GAL* II, pp. 418–419, S II, p. 617. See also Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid 1974: 228.

⁴ ʿAydārūs 2001: 444–453. The text has a strong hagiographical tone so that one could perhaps speak of an *auto-hagiography* better than an autobiography. A partial English translation of this section of the *Nūr* was published by Michael Cooperson as a contribution to a volume on Arabic autobiography (Reynolds 2001: 208–215).

⁵ Al-Šillī 1319 A. H./1901–02, vol. II, pp. 147–152 reproduces also the autobiographical text of ʿAbd al-Qādir contained in the *Nūr al-sāfir* (on al-Šillī, d. 1682, see *GAL* II, p. 383, *GAL* S II, p. 516; Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid 1974: 245–246). In Aydarūs 2001: 11–13 the editors of the *Nūr* provide a short biography of ʿAbd al-Qādir which summarizes a long list of Arabic sources.

⁶ The worthiness of the slave-mother of ʿAbd al-Qādir is proved by the fact that she died on Friday and her last words were the Islamic profession of faith (*tahlīl*: “La ilāha illā allāh”). As sign of appreciation of her piety, her grave was placed next to the shrine of her holy husband. The sometimes irritating hagiographical character of the “autobiography” of ʿAbd al-Qādir apparently was not noticed by the translator who interpreted it only according to some of the most current concepts of modern literary criticism (by the way, this highly disputable approach is followed in the whole volume edited by Reynolds).

dents flocking to him. In his autobiographical note ʿAbd al-Qādir indulges in enumerating his achievements in all the branches of the Islamic traditional learning and in describing his works. Quite expectedly, this possibly annoying self-praising is done only *ad maiorem Dei gloriam* in strict accord with the traditional literary and theological paradigm of the “taḥadduṭ bi-niʿmat Allāh” (speaking of the divine grace: cfr. Quran 93:11).⁷

Among the peculiarities of ʿAbd al-Qādir’s personality, there is his bibliophilia: he was a passionate book collector who made many efforts to reach and acquire rare books everywhere in the world. Apparently he managed to make up a remarkable library putting together his findings with the volumes he inherited from his father.

ʿAbd al-Qadir died in 1628 in Aḥmadābād where he is buried.⁸ His literary production is wide and multifaceted.⁹

In prose, among others, he produced two commentaries on the *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* of al-Ġazzālī, a commentary on the *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Buḥārī and three texts on the biography of the Prophet. He wrote also poetry collected in a *dīwān* called *al-Rawḍ al-arīḍ wa-al-fayḍ al-mustafīd* which is still unpublished.

The most famous work of ʿAbd al-Qādir is without doubt the *Nūr al-sāfir ʿan aḥbār al-qarn al-ʿāšir*.¹⁰ The *Nūr* is basically a historiographical text organized according to a year after year annalistic structure and collecting information on events of the sole 10th century of the hegira. The greatest part of

⁷ Cfr. ʿAydārūs 2001: 453 where ʿAbd al-Qādir openly refers to this model mentioning some other famous authors who before him wrote about themselves. Among these authors, he quotes also the most famous representative of this literary genre Ġalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī whose autobiography (on which see Sartain 1975 and 1975b) is exactly entitled *al-Taḥadduṭ bi-niʿmat Allāh*.

⁸ According to a gloss contained in the manuscript which was the base for the first printed edition of the work (see ʿAydārūs 2001: 444, note of the editor 1) the exact date of death of the author of the *Nūr* should be the 10th *muḥarram* 1037 (21 August 1627). The *Nūr* also mentions also the birth of the son of the author Šayḥ b. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-ʿAydārūs (year 998 A.H. [1589–90], ʿAydārūs 2001: 592–593).

⁹ It is beyond the scope of the paper to try to build up a complete list of the works of ʿAbd al-Qādir which is not available so far. A comparison among the titles appearing in the sources, those mentioned by the author himself in his autobiography and those retraceable in the catalogues of manuscripts would surely produce a list of at least thirty different works.

¹⁰ A short but acute and insightful analysis of the *Nūr al-sāfir* and its author from a historical perspective can be found in the BA thesis of Carol Ross 2012. Ho 2006 makes wide use of the book from a specific anthropological perspective which is rightly criticized in Ross 2012: 5–6.

the data contained in the *Nūr* regards famous people whose date of death fell in the period between 901 and 1000 of the Islamic calendar (September 21, 1495 – October 7, 1592). According to the colophon of the author, the work was completed on 12th *rabīʿ al-tānī* 1012 A.H. (19th September 1603 C.E.).

In the first place, the *Nūr* can thus be considered as belonging to the genre of *wafayāt*.¹¹ This is the way his author also sees its work:

“... I mentioned in [my work] the obituaries of the people whose date of death I managed to ascertain among all those who died in this century”. The persons whose biography is described in the *Nūr* are “the learned men, the saints, the judges, the men of culture, the kings and the prominent personalities” of any geographical origin (“Egyptian, Syrian, Hijazene, Yemenite, Anatolian, Indian, from the Mašriq and the Mağrib”).¹²

However, ʿAbd al-Qādir did not want to limit his work to a collection of obituaries but decided to “include also mention of events, happenings, marvelous stories. For every personage a peculiar event occurred to him will be mentioned together with some poetry he composed”. So in the end he hopes that his book will be “A book of tales, jurisprudence, history and *belles lettres*”.¹³

A cursory analysis of the names of the people mentioned in the *Nūr* shows that the author clearly focused his attention on his fellow members of the Bā ʿAlawī group, especially those still living in Yemen. These are the most recurrent persons and their biographies are the longest and most detailed. Besides them, ʿAbd al-Qādir also presents some information on Indian learned men and rulers, on scholars of different origin but living in Mecca or Medina and finally but interestingly on four Ottoman sultans¹⁴ and three sultans of Gujarat.¹⁵

¹¹ Biographical dictionary made up of a collection of obituaries. The most famous representative of this genre is Ibn Ḥalliqān’s *Wafayāt al-aʿyān*. For a literary appreciation of this genre see e.g. Fahndrich 1973. It is remarkable that an apparently abridged version of the *Nūr* (mentioned in Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid 1974: 228) significantly carries the title *Wafayāt al-akābir fī al-qarn al-ʿāšir* where the word *wafayāt* is mentioned in the very title.

¹² ʿAydārūs 2001: 17.

¹³ “Arğū an yakūna hāda al-kitāb kitāb ḥadīṭ wa-fiqh wa-taʾrīḥ wa-adab”: ʿAydārūs 2001: 18.

¹⁴ *Sulṭān* Salīm al-ʿuṭmānī (ʿAydārūs 2001: 171), *sulṭān* (actually *ṣehzade*) Bāyazīd al-ʿuṭmānī (ʿAydārūs 2001: 340), *sulṭān* Sulaymān b. Salīm al-ʿuṭmāniyayn ʿAydārūs (2001: 396), *sulṭān* Salīm b. *sulṭān* Sulaymān al-ʿuṭmāniyayn (ʿAydārūs 2001: 466–467).

¹⁵ *Sulṭān* Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad (ʿAydārūs 2001: 137–138), *sulṭān* Muzaḥḥar Šāh b. Maḥmūd (ʿAydārūs 2001: 256–257), *sulṭān* Maḥmūd Šāh ʿAydārūs (2001: 339–340).

Besides the obituaries, as stated in the introduction, the author notes also some important events in the *Nūr*: they are basically shocking facts (floods, plagues, tempests, fires, earthquakes, astronomical phenomena and other natural catastrophes or unusual events) which have certainly a historical relevance but are evidently mentioned also to impress the reader and arouse his emotions. Jurisprudence is also present, as the book contains two sections dealing with the problem of the permissibility of coffee¹⁶ and an excursus on the legal status of the holy men and their miracles.¹⁷ In the end, the *Nūr* can really be considered as a text of *adab*, a concoction of historiography, geography, entertaining and exciting stories and tales and interesting and educative information.¹⁸

The *Nūr* apparently enjoyed a relatively high reputation in the Arabic-Islamic world. The manuscript tradition of the work is so far very partially known: Brockelmann lists 9 manuscripts of which 7 are kept in India and two in Europe (London and Leipzig [fragment]). Ayman Fu'ad Sayyid mentions two more manuscripts kept respectively in Turkey and Egypt. The 2001 printed edition is based on a manuscript kept in the al-Aḥqāf library in Tarīm¹⁹ whose text has been collated with the *editio princeps* published in Bagdad by Muḥammad Rašīd al-Ṣaffār in 1934. Even if these data are too incomplete to draw any conclusion, one could tentatively infer that the main area of circulation of the text was India.

There are hints to the presence of the *Nūr* in Yemen, in Egypt and Syria. The work was supplemented by the above mentioned Yemeni learned man al-Šillī who wrote a *takmila* under the title *al-Sanā' al-bāhir bi-takmil al-nūr al-sāfir*.²⁰ The Egyptian Zayn al-Dīn Muḥammad Madyan b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ṭabīb [al-Qūṣūnī] (d. after 1634) produced an excerpt of the *Nūr* containing only the information about the Egyptian personages mentioned by 'Abd al-Qādir.²¹ Finally, the *Nūr* became one of the main sources of the famous

¹⁶ 'Aydārūs 2001: 190–193.

¹⁷ 'Aydārūs 2001: 128–131 and 259–260.

¹⁸ This highly mixed character of the work makes it difficult to use the *Nūr* as a reliable historical source (see on this point the remarks by Serjeant 1963: 39).

¹⁹ Collection Ibn Sahl, *ta'riḥ* 2206 (dated to the 11th century A.H./1592–1689). On the al-Aḥqāf library see van den Boogert 1992.

²⁰ See GAL II, p. 383, S II, p. 516, Ayman Fu'ad Sayyid 1974: 245.

²¹ The work is contained the manuscript Leiden, University Library 1042 (GAL S II, p. 617; cfr. Voorhoeve 1957: 257). The same Muḥammad Madyan also wrote a collection of *wafayāt* of famous people who died in the 10th century of the *hiġra* (Voorhoeve 1957: 320–321).

Šaḡarāt al-ḡahab fī aḥbār man ḡahab the huge biographical dictionary of the Syrian Ibn ʿImād al-ḥanbalī (d. 1679).

Further research is however needed to assess the real success of the text in the Islamic world.

IMĀM AḤMAD IN THE *NŪR AL-SĀFIR*: THE TEXTS

For the scholars of Ethiopian Studies, the *Nūr al-sāfir* has one very specific reason of interest. The text mentions twice the famous *imām* Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm, leader of the expansionist movement that the Muslims of the Horn carried out at the mid of the 16th century.²²

There can be no doubt that the events of the *ḡihād* of *imām* Aḥmad found an immediate echo in India (particularly in Gujarat) and the fame of the leader of the Muslims of the Horn became established in the Subcontinent. Information about the momentous facts in Ethiopia did not remain only an oral tradition moving across the Indian Ocean but also entered the Islamic Arabic historiography of India. The *imām* and his military found thus their way into the *Ẓafar al-wāliḥ bi-muẓaffar wa-āliḥ* a chronicle written by ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Makkī al-Āṣafī al-Ulūḡhānī (nicknamed *al-Ḥāḡḡī Dabīr*; d. after 1611) and devoted the history of the sultans of Gujarat and of the Muslim rulers in Northern India.²³

In his work al-Ulūḡhānī refers how he was impressed by the massive presence of brave soldiers of Ethiopian origin (the so-called *Rūmīḥānī*) in the Gujarati army. He then acquired a copy of the *Tuḥfat al-zamān taʾrīḥ man manna bihi al-karīm al-mannān*²⁴ and apparently was driven to the conclusion that the Ethiopian troops in India were made up of the descendants of the Christian Ethiopians defeated and enslaved in “al-Dayr”, where the troops of

²² The *ḡihād* of *imām* Aḥmad is probably the most important event in the history of pre-modern Ethiopia. Among the very wide bibliography, for a first orientation one may consult the general article F.-Chr. Muth, “Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ġāzī”, *E Ae* 1 (2003), pp. 155–158.

²³ For some general information on al-Ulūḡhānī see *GAL* S II, pp. 599–600. The work of Ulūḡhānī was published by Denison Ross, 1910, 1921 and 1928 translated into English by Lokhandwala 1970 and 1974 (the translation is sometimes far from being accurate and many times definitively incorrect).

²⁴ This is the title of the Arabic chronicle (variants: *Tuḥfat/Bahḡat al-zamān* more commonly known in scholarly literature as *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* (*GAL* II, p. 410, *GAL* S II, p. 569) narrating the events of the *ḡihād* of Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm. The bibliography on this text is bulky: see, among others, F.-Chr. Muth, “Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša”, *E Ae* 2 (2005), pp. 593–594; a recent analysis of the text in the PhD thesis of Chekroun 2013.

the *imām* overwhelmed the forces of the Negus.²⁵ To reinforce his hypothesis and to prove to the readers the admirable courage of the Ethiopians, al-Ulūghānī decides to include an excerpt from the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* in his text.²⁶

The long quotation of the *Tuḥfat al-zamān* – *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* in al-Ulūghānī's *Ẓafar al-wāliḥ* is well-known to the researchers on Islam in Ethiopia who do not fail to mention it when necessary,²⁷ even if a detailed and careful textual analysis of the excerpt of the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* contained in the *Ẓafar al-wāliḥ* is a task still to be accomplished.²⁸

The two mentions of the *imām* in the *Nūr al-sāfir* (practically contemporary to the *Ẓafar al-wāliḥ*) have passed so far completely unnoticed. Here are the texts.

°Abd al-Qādir first refers to Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm in his entry for the year [9]34 (1527-28):²⁹

وفي سنة اربع وثلاثين اخذ الامام الجراد احمد مدينة هرر من بلاد الحبشة
وضعف عن مقاومته سلطانها وكان من ولد سعد الدين و لم يزل امر الامام
بعد يعظم حتى صار الى ما صار اليه واستفتح كثيرا من بلاد الحبشة وقهر

²⁵ The reference is to the battle of Aldīr, read al-Dayr by Denison Ross 1921: 578 and Eddir in the French translation of Basset 1897: 17–18, Basset 1897b: 39–40; the connection of this toponym with the Arabic word Dayr “monastery” is rejected by Basset 1897b: 147 note 1; however the same author lists the toponym under *DYR in the Arabic index (Basset 1897: 356), thus considering *al* as the definite article. It was the first big clash between the *imām*'s forces and the Christian army. According to the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* some of the prisoners caught there were actually sent by Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm to the emir Sulaymān of Zabīd who enslaved them (Basset 1897: 19, Basset 1897b: 43–44). It is theoretically possible that some of these slaves were further sold on the Indian market and subsequently freed to become part of several different local armies (on the Habšīs – the Ethiopians of India most of which were employed as soldiers – see R. Pankhurst, “India, relations with”, *EAE* 3 [2007], pp. 142–145, esp. p. 143).

²⁶ Denison Ross 1921: 578–579 and 584–599; Lokhandwala 1970: 468–470 and Lokhandwala 1974: 475–487.

²⁷ Cerulli 1971: 118–119; Muth, “Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ġāzī”, *EAE* 1 (2003), pp. 155–158; Id., “Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša”, *ibid.* 2 (2005), pp. 593–594 and Chekroun 2013: 82–83 (apparently based only on the above mentioned English translation).

²⁸ One more text about Ethiopia which was known in India is the *Sīrat al-Ḥabaša* of al-Ḥaymī (d. 1660). Two manuscripts of this work have been detected so far in the Subcontinent, one in Bankipore and another in Rampur (van Donzel 1986: 77).

²⁹ °Aydarus 2001: 265.

الكفار وواظب على الجهاد والغزو في سبيل الله ونقل عنه في ذلك ما يبهر العقول حتى سمعت بعضهم يقول ما تشبه فتوحاته الا بمثل فتوحات الصحابة وناهيك فيمن يكون بهذه المثابة وكذلك حكى من امر شجاعته حكايات غريبة قالوا وكانت اموره جميعا على قوانين الشرعية الغراء حتى انه كان يخرج الخمس من الغنيمة ويصرفه الى اقارب النبي (صلعم)

رأى بعض الاخيار النبي (صلعم) ومعه ابو بكر وعمر وعثمان وعلي رضي الله عنهم وعندهم الامام المذكور قال الرائي فقلت يا رسول الله من هذا الرجل قال هذا الرجل نشأ فصلاح به بلاد الحبشة وكانت هذه الرؤيا قبل ان يترقى الامام الى هذا المقام ورأى بعضهم العيدروس وهو يقول لا تسموه سلطانا ولا اميرا سموه امام المسلمين

وبالجملة فكان هذا الرجل من آيات الله تعالى رحمه الله تعالى آمين

In the year 34 the *imām*, the *garād* Aḥmad³⁰ conquered the city of Harar in the land of al-Ḥabaša. The sultan of the city was too weak to resist to him, even if he was one of the descendants of Saʿd al-Dīn. The power of the *imām* steadily kept increasing and became as strong as it eventually was. He conquered a big part of the land of al-Ḥabaša and crushed the unbelievers. He kept persistently carrying out the *ḡihād* and making military expeditions for the cause of God. From him about his military activity stories are transmitted which dazzle so much the mind that I heard someone saying: “No conquests are equal to his but those of the Companions of the Prophet”. How excellent is the one who reaches that level! Uncommon tales are narrated about his bravery. It is said that all his behaviours were based on the laws of the noble *ṣarīʿa* to such a point that he was setting apart a fifth of the loot to give it to the relatives of the Prophet.

A pious person saw the Prophet with Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUṭmān and ʿAlī and the *imām* was with them. The one who had the vision narrates: “I said: ‘O messenger of God, who is this man?’ The Prophet responded: ‘This man will grow up and thanks to him the country of Abyssinia will be restored’. This vision happened before the

³⁰ I prefer the variant *garād* (i.e. *garād*, a title carried by local rulers in the Horn of Africa; on it see A. Gori, “Gärad”, *EAE* 2 [2005], 696–697) attested in the manuscript of al-Aḥqāf instead of *ḡawād* which appears in the printed editions (ʿAydarūs 2001: 265 note 1). The modern editors evidently corrected a word which was unknown to them. It is remarkable that the *imām* Aḥmad is given the title of *garād* only in a couple of Christian sources (“Letter of 1550 from the King of Abyssinia to the King of Portugal” in Whiteway 1902: 116–117 and “Letter from the King of Abyssinia to the Governor of India which was despatched [sic!] in 1551” in Whiteway 1902: 120) but no Islamic text except the one I am here discussing calls him so.

imām had reached his high rank”. Someone saw al-°Aydārūs saying: °Do not call him sultan nor emir! Call him *imām* of the Muslims’.

To sum up this man was a sign of God the Highest (may God the Highest have mercy of him!).

The second passage of the *Nūr* about Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm can be found under the heading “year [9]39 (1532-33)”.³¹

وفي سنة تسع وثلاثين قفل سيدي الشيخ الجد عبد الله العيدروس من الحج الى عدن وامر ولده سيدي الشيخ الوالد بالذهاب الى الامام احمد الجراد بالحبشة بسبب دين لحقه ففعل وحصل المقصود على احسن الوجوه واجملها ورجع الى عند والده بعدن في مدة يسيرة جدا وقضى الله عنه ذلك الدين الذي كان استدانه في سفره الى الحج ورأيت بخط سيدي الوالد أن جائزة الجراد لهم كانت ألف وخمسمائة ذهب

In the year 39, my grandfather *šayḥ sayyidī* °Abdallāh al-°Aydārūs came back from the *ḥaḡḡ* to °Aden in a caravan. He ordered to his son, my father, to go to the *imām* Aḥmad *al-ḡarād*³² in Abyssinia because of a debt which had incurred to him. He did that and reached the goal in the best and easiest way. He came back to his father in Aden in a very short time. God settled the debt that he [the *imām*] had made with him [°*šayḥ* °Abdallāh] during his journey to the *ḥaḡḡ*. I saw a document written by the hand of my father that the reward of al-ḡarād³³ for them was 1500 golden pieces.³⁴

These two passages of the *Nūr al-sāfir* are interesting at least from two points of view: they provide us with some previously unknown details about the biography of *imām* Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm and they give us further insight into the circulation of information and texts among Ethiopia, Yemen and Gujarat in the 16th century.

IMĀM AḤMAD IN THE *NŪR AL-SĀFIR*: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE TEXTS

Differently from Ulūḡḡhānī, °Abd al-Qādir °Aydārūs neither quote nor refers in any way to the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* in the *Nūr*. Hints to a possible

³¹ °Aydarus 2001: 273.

³² As in the previous passage, I choose the variant *al-ḡarād* attested in the manuscript of al-Aḥqāf instead of the reading *al-ḡawād* introduced by the editors of the printed edition.

³³ The printed text reads *al-ḡawād* but I correct in *ḡarād* according to the two other similar occurrences.

³⁴ The episode is mentioned also by Ross 2012: 39–40.

knowledge of Šihāb al-Dīn's work by al-ʿAydārūs could be however be detected in his text.

The story of the holy man (*baʿḍ al-aḥyār*) who had a vision of the Prophet and the four *ḥalīfa*-s foretelling the exceptional fate of the *imām* is narrated also in the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* where the dreamer otherwise unknown Saʿd b. Yūnus al-ʿArǧī³⁵ and in his dream the third *ḥalīfa* ʿUṭmān is absent.³⁶

The brief mention of Abū Bakr b. ʿAbdallāh al-ʿAydārūs (d. 1508 the “patron saint” of Aden)³⁷ appearing to some unidentified person to order him to call Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm “imām” and not “emir nor sultan” corresponds exactly to a famous passage of the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*.³⁸ The granting of the title of *imām* to Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm was a relevant moment in the career of the personage and played a crucial role in the creation of his public (religious-political) image marking his irreconcilable rupture with the rulers of the Walasmaʿ dynasty and his stepping up to the leadership of the *ǧihād* movement.³⁹

In direct connection with this hagiographic episode, the *Nūr al-sāfir* highlights the victory of *imām* Aḥmad on the ruler of Harar and the beginning of his government in the city. So far no exact date for this real turning point in the history of the whole area has been fixed and any time between 1525 and

³⁵ Basset 1897: 13, Basset 1897b: 29–30; for the passage in Uluǧhānī see Denison Ross 1921: 579.

³⁶ On this episode see Cerulli 1971: 118, note 22 who refuses to consider the absence of ʿUṭmān as due to Shiite influence. It is remarkable that the text of Uluǧhānī has the odd reading “šānšalah” which corresponds to “našaʿa fa-šalaḥa” of the *Nūr* and “yušliḥu allāhu taʿālā biḥ” (Basset 1897: 13) of the *Futūḥ*.

³⁷ The text of the *Nūr* has only “ʿAydārūs” which is evidently used as an antonomastic for the renowned holy man.

³⁸ Basset 1897: 13; 1897b: 27–29. In the *Futūḥ* the vision has one more protagonist: together with Abū Bakr b. ʿAbdallāh al-ʿAydārūs an elsewhere unknown Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Qurašī al-Tūnisī appears in dream to *šayḥ* Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dahmānī al-Maǧribī. This last *šayḥ* is actually the son of the previous one. His genealogy mentioned in Basset 1897: 4 runs: Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid b. Yūsuf b. Yaʿqūb al-Qurašī al-Tūnisī al-Dahmānī al-Maǧribī. The name is not retraceable in the most common repertoires. However, his *nasab* makes him a descendant of the famous Tunisian saint of Qurayshite origin Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb al-Dahmānī al-Tūnisī (d. 1224, buried in al-Qayrāwān; the town of al-Dahmānī in Northern Tunisia derives its name from this holy man). The mention of this personage (and other individuals) of Maǧribī origin in the *Futūḥ* is remarkable and would deserve more in-depth investigation.

³⁹ On the usage of the title *imām* by Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm see Wagner 1975 and Cerulli 1971.

1527 has been indicated as a possible chronological location.⁴⁰ In his *Nūr* ʿAbd al-Qādir dates the episode to 1527-28 thus making the later dating of the event more reliable.

The reference to the defeated emir of Harar as a descendant of Saʿd al-Dīn proves that the ʿAbd al-Qādir was acquainted with the history of the Muslims of Ethiopia and with sultān Saʿd al-Dīn who had acquired great fame as a martyr of the Islamic cause.⁴¹

Beside these few specific data and elements, the passage of the *Nūr* contains only a general praise of the *imām* and of his political and military activity in an almost panegyric tone which resembles many sections of the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša* without literally reproducing any of them.

The basic reason for ʿAbd al-Qādir to extoll Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm is that he was a righteous and pious ruler who implemented the Islamic law in every aspect of the social life.⁴² The conquest of Ethiopia and his victory on the Christians also deserve to be admired: the *imām* was a courageous fighter and his bravery and military skills are comparable only to those of the companions of the Prophet.⁴³

It is evident that at the moment when he wrote his *Nūr* ʿAbd al-Qādir was perfectly aware of the death of the *imām*.⁴⁴ Most probably the author also knew of the disastrous outcomes of the *imām*'s attempt to conquer Ethiopia.⁴⁵ However, the final defeat of Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm does not apparently diminish the value of his *ḡihād* which remains worthy to be heartedly admired.

The second short passage that ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Aydarūs devotes to *imām* Aḥmad in his *Nūr* reveals a so far totally unknown detail of the biography of the “conqueror of Abyssinia”.

⁴⁰ Muth, “Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ġāzī”, *EAE* 1 (2003), p. 155; E. Wagner, “Harar history till 1875”, *EAE* 2 (2005), pp. 1015–1019, esp. p. 1015.

⁴¹ On Saʿd al-Dīn (d. 1413) sultan of Ifat and martyr of the *ḡihād* see E. Wagner, “Saʿdaddīn Abū ʿI-Barakāt Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ḥarb Arʿad”, *EAE* 4 (2010), pp. 444–445.

⁴² Particularly relevant is the mention of the correct sharing of the booty a fifth of which was granted by the *imām* to the descendants of the Prophet (to whom also ʿAbd al-Qādir belonged) present in his army.

⁴³ The reference to the Companions of the Prophet could not be casual: one could perceive in it a underlying reference to the “first *hiġra*” to Ethiopia and to the presence of the *ṣaḥāba* at the court of the *naġāšī*.

⁴⁴ ʿAbd al-Qādir uses the eulogy for a deceased person (*raḥimahu allāh taʿālā*) mentioning the name of the *imām* for the last time at the end of the section

⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that the text has the verb *istaftaḥa* instead of *fataḥa*.

According to the text, the grandfather of ʿAbd al-Qādir, ʿAbdallāh came back to Aden in 1532-33 from his pilgrimage to Mecca and sent his son (the father of the author), Šayḥ b. ʿAbdallāh to Ethiopia to meet personally *imām* Aḥmad. The aim of the mission was to obtain the settlement of a debt of 1,500 pieces of gold that the leader of the Ethiopian *ḡihād* had incurred in while ʿAbdallāh was travelling to the *ḥaḡḡ*. No further detail is given and the background and circumstances of the event remain completely obscure.

The passage of the *Nūr* confirms that the *imām* Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm had direct and tight relationships not only with local rulers, military commanders and the Ottoman authorities in Yemen but also with the most outstanding representatives of the Yemenite intellectual and political elite (as the ʿAydārūs branch of the Bā ʿAlawī can be considered).

Besides, this section of the *Nūr* gives a clear hint as to how ʿAbd al-Qādir came to know about the events in Ethiopia.

It is well known that members of the Bā ʿAlawī were surely present in the rows of the army of the *imām*⁴⁶ and their direct participation to the events quite naturally fostered the diffusion of information about the war within the different branches of the group in the Horn of Africa, in Yemen and in India.

In the case of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Aydārūs, however, it was not the general network of the *ḥaḡārīma* expatriates but a specific, private family connection the way by which the news about the *ḡihād* in Ethiopia and its leader reached India and were included in the *Nūr*.

Finally, the texts I have analysed do not provide a clear prove that ʿAbd al-Qādir directly knew or read the *Futūḥ al-Ḥabaša*. However, his family background and his bibliophilia make reasonable to hypothesize that he was acquainted with the text of Šihāb al-Dīn's chronicle.

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